

# Reading Russian Documents: Birth Records

Russia “How to” Guide, Intermediate Level: Instruction

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## GOAL

This guide will teach you:

- Important vocabulary related to birth records.
- How to read a Russian Orthodox columnar birth entry.
- How to read a Russian language record for a person in the Russian partition of Poland.

## INTRODUCTION

You may want to consult the following “How to” Guides before continuing:

- [Cyrillic Alphabet](#)
- [Cyrillic Script](#)
- Reading Russian Documents: The Alphabet
- Reading Russian Documents: Deciphering the Handwriting and Understanding the Grammar

The table below reflects important vocabulary that you may find in birth records.

English	Russian
birth	рождение
born	родилась (f), родился (m)
parents	родители
mother	мать
father	отец
son	сын
daughter	дочь
wife	жена
witnesses	восприёмники
baptism	крещение

For additional vocabulary, please see the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#).<sup>1</sup>

## Place Names and Jurisdictions

The Russian Empire consisted of jurisdictions called *guberni* (singular form: gubernia), *oblasti* (singular form: oblast), *uyezdi* (singular form: uyezd) and *okruga* (singular form: okrug). The European, or Western Russian Empire, was divided into guberni, or states. The guberni were then further subdivided into smaller districts or counties called uyezdi. The Caucasus, Central Asia and Far East areas were also divided into states called oblasti, and counties known as okruga.<sup>2</sup> There are several variations for the word village or town, as illustrated in the table below.

English	Russian
province/state/gubernia/ oblast	Губерния/область
county/district/uyezd/ okrug	Уезд/округ
village	село, деревня, посад

## HOW TO

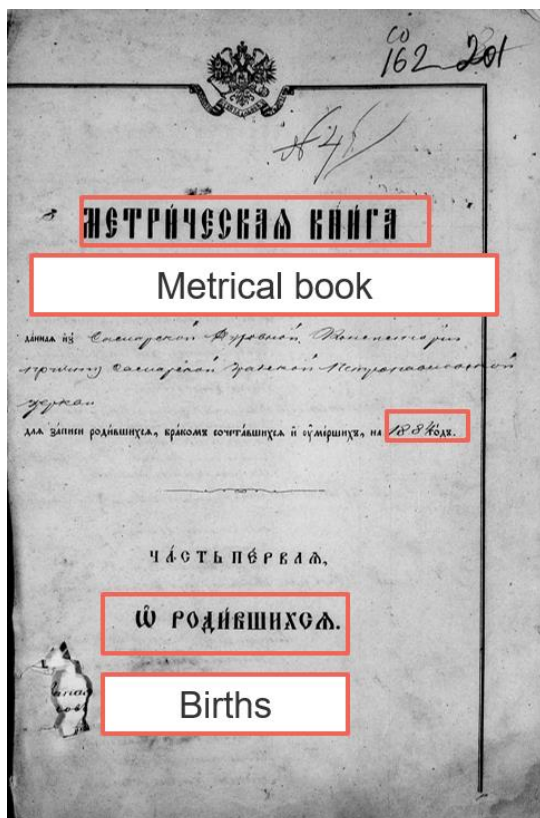
Beginning in 1722, Russian Orthodox churches were required to keep a record of birth, marriage and death records. There was no standardization until 1806, when a printed form was established. In 1838, the form was revised slightly and remained in use until the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917/1918.<sup>3</sup> This guide will teach you how to read the form used between 1838 and 1917/1918.

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<sup>1</sup> "Russian Genealogical Word List," *FamilySearch Wiki* (<http://familysearch.org/wiki>).

<sup>2</sup> Sergei G. Pushkarev, *Dictionary of Russian Historical Terms from the Eleventh Century to 1917*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970); 28, 69, 74, 167.

<sup>3</sup> "Russia Church Records," *FamilySearch Wiki* (<http://familysearch.org/wiki>).



## Look for a Cover Page


Orthodox Church books are often organized by year and subcategorized by record type – birth, marriage and death. Cover pages mark the separation of birth, marriage, and death records. To the left is an example of a cover page for birth records for the year of 1884.

Although this and the headings found within the church books will be written in Church Slavonic, you do NOT need to know how to read Church Slavonic to read a baptismal record. Translations of column headings are provided for you below, and the entries will be written in handwritten Cyrillic script.

## Column Headings

Russian Orthodox Church books consist of a left and right page. Translations of the column headings are provided below.

16605

  
 Metrical book for the [year of].....

Number		Month/Day		Name of Child	Parents' standing, name, patronymic and surname and religion
Male	Female	Birth	Baptism		
2	-	16	22	Иванъ	Симбирской губернии, Алатырская уезд, село Сумароковское крестьянина Ивана Степановича и законной жены его Анастасии Степановны Васильевны, сибиряков православных священникъ Григорий Каменниковъ.

The number column is the x<sup>th</sup> child born in that year. The gender will be found in the corresponding column.


In the date column, if you do not find the month written above the numeric dates, check the entries above. The name of the month may be written at the top of the page, or at the beginning of a new month.

The column entitled *Parents' standing, name, patronymic and surname and religion*, generally follows this format. Bolded words represent standard vocabulary used in each record.

[Of] (name of province) **губернии** (name of district) **уѣзда, села** (name of village),  
 (occupation and name of father) **и законная жена его** (name of mother), (religion).  
**Священникъ** (name of priest).

[Of] (name of province) **gubernia** (name of district) **uyezd, selo** (name of village),  
 (occupation and name of father) **and his lawful wife** (name of mother), (religion). **Priest:**  
 (name of priest).

167 20



Г О Д К , Ч А С Т Ъ П Е Р В А Я , Ѡ Р О Д Н Ъ Ш И Х Ѡ .

Occupation, name, patronymic and surname of the witnesses	Who performed the baptism	Signature of the witnesses, optional
<p><i>Судья селуцкого уезда, села Гривы- ки, крестьянинъ Иванъ Ѡвчаровъ Матвеевъ, крестьянская жена Ксении Абрамова Вдовина. —</i></p>	<p><i>Настоятель Дьяченко</i></p>	

The final column is optional and is often left blank.

### Paragraph Form (In Russian Partition of Poland)

To learn how to read a Polish birth record written in Russian, please see the [Reading Russian Birth Records \(In Poland\) "How to" Guide](http://familysearch.org/wiki/Russia:_How_to_Read_Russian_Birth_Records_(In_Poland)_How_to_Guide).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "Reading Russian Birth Records (In Poland)," FamilySearch Wiki, Russia "How to" Guides (<http://familysearch.org/wiki>).